

Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1.-42. (canceled)

43. (new) A vacuum packaging machine for performing a vacuum sealing operation on product packages, comprising:

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- a) a permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers each arranged to receive at least one unsealed product package and operable to perform an independent vacuum sealing operation on the at least one product package, the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers occupying the same floor space as a single vacuum chamber; ^{size of said stack}
 - b) at least one in-feed conveyor operable to load a selected vacuum chamber with the at least one product package, the at least one in-feed conveyor being vertically movable to select the vacuum chamber to be loaded; and
 - c) at least one out-feed conveyor operable to unload a selected vacuum chamber with the at least one product package, the at least one out-feed conveyor being vertically movable to select the vacuum chamber to be unloaded.

2/ 44. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 43 comprising a plurality of in-feed conveyors which are vertically movable together to select the vacuum chamber to be loaded.

3/ 45. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 44 wherein the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers have a regular spacing between the vacuum chambers, and the plurality of in-feed conveyors have a relative spacing equal to the spacing between the vacuum chambers.

4/ 46. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 43 comprising an internal conveyor in each vacuum chamber extending from the at least one in-feed conveyor.

5/ 47. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 43 comprising a plurality of out-feed conveyors which are vertically movable together to select the vacuum chamber to be unloaded.

46. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 47 wherein the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers have a regular spacing between the vacuum chambers, and the plurality of out-feed conveyors have a relative spacing equal to the spacing between the vacuum chambers.

49. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 43 wherein the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers are vertically fixed in position.

50. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 43 wherein the at least one in-feed conveyor and the at least one out-feed conveyor are synchronously vertically movable.

51. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 43 wherein the at least one in-feed conveyor and the at least one out-feed conveyor are independently vertically movable.

52. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 43 comprising a fixed input conveyor and a fixed output conveyor.

53. (new) A vacuum packaging machine for performing a vacuum sealing operation on product packages, comprising:

- a) a permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers each arranged to receive at least one unsealed product package and operable to perform an independent vacuum sealing operation on the at least one product package, the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers occupying the same floor space as a single vacuum chamber, and the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers being movable together vertically between an upper position and a lower position;
- b) at least one in-feed conveyor operable to load a selected vacuum chamber with the at least one product package; and
- c) at least one out-feed conveyor operable to unload a selected vacuum chamber with the at least one product package.

54. (new) A vacuum packaging machine according to claim 53 comprising a plurality of in-feed conveyors which are operable to load a selected vacuum chamber with the at least one product package.

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55. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim ~~54~~¹² wherein the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers have a regular spacing between the vacuum chambers, and the plurality of in-feed conveyors have a relative spacing equal to the spacing between the vacuum chambers.

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56. (new) A vacuum packaging machine according to claim ~~53~~¹¹ comprising an internal conveyor in each vacuum chamber extending from the at least one in-feed conveyor.

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57. (new) A vacuum packaging machine according to claim ~~53~~¹¹ comprising a plurality of out-feed conveyors which are operable to unload a selected vacuum chamber with the at least one product package.

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58. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim ~~57~~¹⁵ wherein the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers have a regular spacing between the vacuum chambers, and the plurality of out-feed conveyors have a relative spacing equal to the spacing between the vacuum chambers.

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59. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim ~~53~~¹¹ wherein the at least one in-feed conveyor and the at least one out-feed conveyor are vertically fixed in position.

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60. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim ~~53~~¹¹ wherein the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers are vertically movable together relative to the at least one in-feed conveyor to select the vacuum chamber to be loaded.

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61. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim ~~53~~¹¹ wherein the permanently vertical stack of vacuum chambers are vertically movable together relative to the at least one out-feed conveyor to select the vacuum chamber to be unloaded.